

Another Reply to Ty Gibson

While there are many smaller points that could be criticized, my main critique of his article on WO is twofold: (1) he has been extremely selective in the evidence he has chosen to consider and (2) he has overestimated the potential for disunity should a “No” vote prevail in San Antonio while severely underestimating the potential for disunity should a “Yes” vote prevail. Elaborating on these two points:

1. Selective Use of Evidence

Surprisingly, 1 Timothy is disallowed as local and yet is brought in anyway when urging that women can have “management” of the church, citing 1 Tim 1:3 and 1 Tim 3. Of course, Titus 1 is ignored altogether, as has frequently been done in this discussion by those who want to find evidence for WO in the Bible, because the same localizing argument will not work there.

“The vast majority of New Testament passages is not considered (25 of 29 to be exact) where diakonos has its ordinary meaning of “servant” (Matt 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5, 9; 12:26; Rom 13:4; 15:8, etc.), rather than its technical meaning of “deacon” (only in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8, 12). To his credit, he does not suggest that Phoebe was Paul’s “leader” as a recent Ministry article seemed to suggest.

The issue of headship is reduced to seven verses in the New Testament where “head” is mentioned, completely ignoring the equivalent Hebrew word’s usage in the Old Testament (e.g., the “heads” set up by Moses at the direction of the Lord, Exodus 18:25). In addition, the all-too-familiar misrepresentation of headship appears, as if it meant that “all women are under the headship of all men” (it doesn’t) and that pastors are priests who interpose between Jesus and His church (they are not and don’t).

Curiously, while accusing others of being papal, he uses papal language himself in speaking of the “pastoral, ministerial, priestly role.” As Adventists, we have never thought of ministers as priests.

No reference is made to the fact that women never appear as priests or Levites in the Old Testament nor as apostles or elders in the New Testament. Significant in this regard is that he fails to mention Junia (or Junias), apparently realizing that, even if this person was a woman she clearly wasn’t an apostle.

He seems to be unaware that Ellen White’s normal word for a person who had been given a “license to preach” or who had been ordained to the gospel ministry was “minister” not “pastor.” This is obvious even in the few statements he does quote, such as 6T 322, which in the next paragraph on p. 323 uses “minister” and “ministers” not “pastors” in reference to those who receive a license to preach and which refers only to “men suited for this work” rather than to “men and women.”

1 Pet 5:2, where the verb “to shepherd” appears, is mentioned in order to suggest that women “pastors” can be ordained, but the context is completely ignored: Peter as “fellow elder” is

addressing elders who oversee the church (using the verb *episkope?*) and refers to Jesus as the “Chief Shepherd” in v. 4, which shows that these elders oversee the church as His under shepherds. So there is a legitimate headship in the church after all—one with duly ordained leaders who serve under the universal Headship of Christ.

If, as is claimed, “to elevate the pastoral position with language of headship and privilege over other church members is decidedly papal” then why is there such an insistence on ordaining women? Why do for women what is thought to be wrong for men? Is the article really arguing for no headship and no leadership in the church? Apparently not, but if not then this kind of reasoning does not make sense.

2. Issue of Disunity

There is an unwarranted confidence that allowing divisions to decide this issue will somehow magically lead to unity, even though the experiment with ordaining women as local elders and disregarding the world church decisions in order to ordain women as pastors has led to greater disunity and severe polarization in the very fields where this is supposedly desirable and workable.

It is claimed that people want to “vote a universal rule against women’s ordination for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.” Could it be that he is ignorant of the fact that this has been the universal rule for the more than 150 years that we have existed as a church? We have never had any other rule and we have remained solidly united. It is the pushing of the WO agenda over the past 40 years through church media and church policy changes that has contributed to increasing division among us.

He also seems unaware of the fact that those denominations who have moved forward in ordaining women have experienced increasing conflict and schism—not greater unity.

While insisting that ordaining women has nothing to do with whether the gay lifestyle should be accepted, it is an undeniable fact that the same line of reasoning is used by those advocating for same sex marriage and the ordination of gay clergy. Significantly, the recent book by Hanna and Tutsch reject the argument that ordaining women will lead to the ordination of transgender individuals while failing to ask the more pressing question about gay clergy.

Largely ignored in the debate are the views of the vast majority of church members. Apart from anecdotal evidence, the only solid research we have for Adventist attitudes toward women as elders, ordained ministers, or senior pastors is negative. Why has not a large-scale study of member attitudes been done? Are we afraid of what we might find (or perhaps already know)? Many conference presidents in North America would gladly hire more women as pastors, but outside of institutional settings there are few if any churches who will accept them.

In view of the negative attitude of many church members toward ordaining women as pastors, there would seem to be a greater risk of schism if church leadership continues to try to force members to accept women as senior pastors and, worse, as ordained clergy. The disregard by some unions of the consistent and persistent rejection by the GC session of proposals to

ordain women (1881, 1990, 1995) poses the real threat to church unity and recklessly exposes our church to the risk of schism.

Despite denials to the contrary, faithfulness to Scripture is the real issue. As the only truly global Protestant church, active in more countries even than the Roman Catholic Church, our source of unity has always been our faithfulness to Scripture. If we leave this foundation, declaring that the Bible is unclear and that we must trust the church to do what is best then we have essentially abandoned our Protestant faith and capitulated to the Catholic position.